

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes
FINAL
May 12, 2010, 7:30 p.m.
Chenery Middle School Community Room

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Becker, Callanan, Dash, Epstein, Hofmann, Lynch, Manjikian, Millane, Smith; BOS Chair Jones; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

Town Administrator Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Conti

Members Absent: Bruschi, Libenson and McLaughlin

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began by turning to the Minuteman report.

Minuteman Report

Chair Curtis invited Mr. Joe Scali, Minuteman School Committee Representative, and Ms. Camie Lamica, Director of Business and Operations at Minuteman, to the WC table. Member Callanan provided an overview and update of the Minuteman budget. The budget has been reduced by 7% (a reduction of \$1M). A list of reductions was reviewed, including elimination of 11.5 FTE and two programs, and reduction of professional development. Belmont is one of 16 member towns, and the member towns are assessed. The per pupil cost is based on Minuteman costs and enrollment.

Last summer, the BOS appointed a Minuteman study group. \$19K is the per-pupil cost for Belmont and Belmont has 38 students enrolled in Minuteman, 19 of whom are special education. Programmatic analysis began this year, but communication was not very forthcoming, Member Callanan said. She then identified several “special issues”.

- *Capital Needs* – These are significant, including the need for a new roof. Capital needs are paid for by the 16 member towns. The Feasibility study is under consideration, and TM disapproved of borrowing the money at its April 28th meeting because of the low enrollment issue. Belmont would be interested in participating in funding an enrollment study.
- *Enrollment* – It has declined significantly. There are 443 students there currently from member towns, and 255 students from non-member towns. The Superintendent is committed to “right-sized” enrollment.
- *Non-Member Students* – Students who attend from non-member towns pay below the member district rates. Belmont is concerned about this inequity, as it is subsidizing non-member students. Out-of-district tuition money has been used to offset lost revenue.

- *Committee* – A committee is being put together to examine regionalization and the district member town agreement.

Ms. Lamica, Director of Business and Operations, noted that one of her main responsibilities has been to put Minuteman's budget together and to make the necessary cuts to the budget. She noted that the Belmont per-pupil average is \$19K which does include transportation expenses for busing. The non-member tuition for FY11 is at \$16.8K for regular education, plus an additional \$5K for special education students, plus the cost for transportation.

Ms. Lamica noted that staff reductions included 4 secretaries and some custodians, and is close to 20 FTEs. With regard to the enrollment, she explained that Minuteman has not been able to market strongly to member towns, but that there is a 4% increase in applications for September. Member Allison asked about tuition offsetting lost revenue. Ms. Lamica explained that Minuteman tuition from out-of-district students is collected and then spent in the next year, but Minuteman has recently started spending current tuition money in the current fiscal year, which decreases the available balance to be applied to the following year's expenses. She noted that this could not continue. The lost revenue reflects in part a Chapter 70 reduction.

Regarding capital improvements, she noted that the building is 35 years old and much of the equipment needs to be replaced. The school was built for 1,000 students with 1975 specifications. Regarding the Regional Agreement Task Force, the 16 member towns have been discussing the member agreement as well as the fact that the Capital needs are distributed across the member towns. Some towns want the agreement reviewed. The final report is due in September.

Member Hofmann noted that Minuteman has been expensive to run and that there is a long history of overpaying for many years. In fact, Belmont's school budget has been adversely impacted by Minuteman's expense. These efforts, he said, should have been made years ago, and the failure to do so contributes to the current climate.

Subcommittee Final Reports

Capital Budget

BOS Chair Jones noted that \$600K is allocated to the Capital Budget if the override is successful. He said that the high school univent project could be a future debt exclusion, which would allow \$180K to be put to the building envelope work. He said that the police station is leaking and needs re-pointing, \$180K could be added to the roads' budget, and \$150K would be allocated to sidewalk repair.

Education

Member Lynch said that the schools spent slightly over \$44M on education in FY10, and approximately 10% of that came from outside the school budget. Expenditures outside

the budget include: repayment of debt; town services provided mainly by General Government, Public Safety, and Public Works; retirement costs for non-teacher employees; and Minuteman. Belmont receives revenue offsets of approximately \$5.5M, largely from Chapter 70 state aid.

The student needs-based budget totaled approximately \$42M, while the available-revenue funding was about \$40M from town funds. The schools, he said, are moving toward a programmatic budget, and 10 major program categories were identified. However, the data from this year to last is not compatible for comparisons.

Member Lynch highlighted long-term issues, observations, and recommendations from the Education Subcommittee on the budget. They included: the inconsistency of cost increases and revenue growth, the continuing use of one-time money, high personnel costs, and significant retiree medical costs.

He also noted that the state keeps adding unfunded mandates (recently relating to obesity and bullying) while cutting local aid. The schools need to fund the maintenance of facilities to preserve the significant investment. Member Lynch indicated that the Subcommittee supported the decision to reduce the HR department by 1.0 FTE through attrition. He recommended that the WC Education Subcommittee meet with some members of the School Committee in the fall to review the end of the year budget report filed with the state to determine how the appropriated budget was spent for FY10 before beginning work on the 2012 budget.

General Government

Member Millane reviewed that, in Finance & Accounting, the part-time budget analyst position would be maintained. There is a need for this department to be more technologically savvy. To help move to the next step, the General Government subcommittee would like to see a summer group study the area of technology upgrades. The Assessors and Town Clerk office also need better automation.

Member Dash reviewed that HR is doing benefits and administration (which are mandated tasks), and that they are adding back advertising funding to recruit applicants. Their unfunded mandates are increasing, he said, without staff increases. The Town Administrator office has revenue offsets from the Beech Street Center rental fees and liquor license fees. The TA staff mainly supports the BOS endeavors, and there is a proposal to cut the legal service budget. There has been a decrease in budget and employees over time. The VFW is not paying market rent.

Public Works

Member Epstein said that there is a staffing issue that needs to get resolved before the fiscal year ends, but that this could not be discussed publicly.

Public Safety

Member Manjikian said that both the fire and police budgets are in line with FY10. The police budget lost one cruiser and overtime budgets for both Police and Fire were impacted. Regionalization of 911 is being explored.

Discussion of Remaining Warrant Articles

Article 6 – Non Contributory Pensions

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 6.
The motion passed unanimously.

Article 7 – Contributory Pensions

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 7.
The motion passed unanimously.

Article 8 – Appropriation of “Up Front” Funds for Highway Improvements

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 8.
The motion passed unanimously.

Article 5 – Salary of Elected officials

Member Allison moved favorable action on Article 5.

Member Hofmann questioned whether the reduced salary was comparable to other towns. Member Epstein replied that the data was reviewed statewide regarding the town clerk salary ranges. In looking specifically at towns comparable in size to Belmont, the median was actually less than \$60K for the entry level tier, therefore \$60K seemed fair and appropriate.

The motion passed, with 11 voting in favor and 2 abstaining.

Article 12 – High School HVAC Bond De-Authorization

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 12.
The motion passed unanimously.

Article 10 – Appropriation for Water and Sewer and Stormwater Services

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on the first part of Article 10 (water enterprise).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on the second part of Article 10 (sewer and storm water enterprise).
The motion passed unanimously.

Article 9 – Appropriation of Capital Budget

(\$2.6M and an additional \$600K if the override passes).

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 9.
The motion passed unanimously.

Article 4 – Budget Appropriation

The WC discussed the possibility that budget-oriented amendments might be offered by TM members on TM floor this year, like last year. It was suggested that any amendments be submitted ahead of time.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (General Government).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Allison moved favorable action on Article 4 (employee retiree benefits, with an override adjustment of \$50K for health benefits).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (Public Safety, with a \$225K override adjustment).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (Belmont Public Schools, with a \$1M override adjustment).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (Minuteman).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (Public Works, with an override adjustment of \$82K).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (Human Services: COA, Health, Animal Control Veterans).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (Culture and Recreation, with a \$14K override adjustment).
The motion passed unanimously.

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 4 (Debt and Interest on Debt).

The motion passed unanimously.

Article 3 - Transfer Balances

Member Hofmann moved favorable action on Article 3.

The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes

The minutes were postponed until next week's meeting.

Other

Chair Curtis stated that, at next week's meeting, the nominating committee will discuss positions for next year's WC. Summer projects will be discussed then as well. There will be a final meeting in June to finish up WC business.

Member Hofmann moved to adjourn at 9:09 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary